

Teaching with Owl Pellets

- Supply List:
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| 1. owl pellets | 2. spray bottle of water |
| 3. paper plates (2 per student) | 4. toothpicks |
| 5. clean table space and desk | 6. an assistant * this can be a responsible student |

Step 1. Preparation:

Gather the necessary supplies listed above. Clean off tables to keep dust off of normal school supplies.

SPECIAL NOTE: We now use *heat treatment* to cook/ kill all larva, eggs or anything else that we know of that can be harmful. We heat at 250 degrees for four hours as is recommended by the Federal Government. The only harmful potential left is that someone could have an allergy to the fur. Mostly I find it is the "idea" of touching owl spit that stops a student with this project. Just moistening the pellets will increase odor, so an open window is a good idea.

Sometimes when teaching I get one or two students who cannot be persuaded to participate. A suggestion is to have them research owls or birds of prey, skeletons, cloths moths, rodents or any subject that is related. You can also access our web site: www.discountowlpellets.com
Please send us your book reviews, including age range for reading. (Such as: 3rd to 5th grade and so on)

Step 2. Setup:

Divide the pellets on the paper plates, one per student. Spray them each at least twice so that they can easily be torn apart by hand. (Bargain pellets may not need any spray.) When using bargain pellets you'll notice you have a lot of extra pellets. Fill an extra plate with pellets and spray them to start them softening. These are then ready to pass out to students having difficulty finding bones. Place one toothpick per plate, then put the 2nd plate on top (upside down) so as to hide the project. Keep the spray bottle handy for tough pellets.

Step 3. Basic directions:

Instruct students to work *slowly* to avoid breaking bones. Use one plate to work from, placing the clean bones *without fur* on the second plate. Then pass out the pellets.

It is advisable to walk around respraying tough pellets. Some students may need your help to get started so pull one or two bones out for them. Often there is so much excitement that remaining seated becomes a problem, so keep moving from student to student. One way to control younger children is to tell them not to worry about what kind of bones they find, but how many. Later you can work on bone identification.

Large bones will be easily found such as skulls. The owls typically crush the back part of the skull and you will find many of these fragments. Vertebrae and tail bones can be found sometimes by rolling fur between the fingers. Some small bones such as foot bones take a good deal of patience to find so a younger student shouldn't worry about them too much.

Step 4. Pass out bone charts:

The bones can be placed on top of their respective images on the charts. Sharing of bones should be encouraged at this time, especially skulls and other major bones. Use common names for bones with the younger grades. To review, or for work on another day, names should be written on the plates. Plates can then be stacked for storage.

Step 5. Advanced:

Older students or skilled children for extra credit (or challenge) can go on to this step. Accurate bone placement should be stressed at this level. Finding bones of the same rodent is helpful. The vole is the primary type you'll find. It is very difficult to find a complete rat or shrew skeleton. You can use a basic magnifying glass to help with details for bone identification. The final stage is to take tweezers and dip each bone in a pool of glue, then replace the bones on the chart.

